

Children & Family Services Review

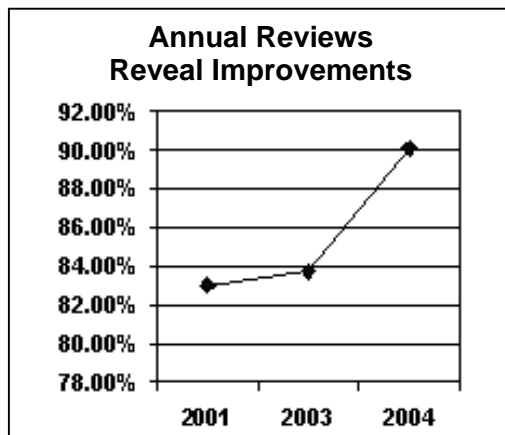
Ensuring Quality Child Welfare Services

Background:

The 1994 amendments to the Social Security Act authorized the federal Department of Health and Human Services to review state child and family service programs to ensure compliance with state plan requirements in Titles IV-B and IV-E of the Act. The reviews are designed to help states improve child welfare services and outcomes for families and children who receive those services, and they encompass child protective services, foster care, adoption, family preservation, family support, and independent living services. The Children and Family Services Review (CFSR) process identifies each state's strengths and needs, as well as areas where technical assistance could lead to program improvements.

North Dakota's CFSR Results:

- A federal Children and Family Services Review was conducted in North Dakota in 2001. Reviewers used information from multiple sources including a statewide assessment, on-site reviews of a sample of children and families served (in Cass, Grand Forks, and Burleigh counties), statewide data, and interviews with state and community representatives.
- No state achieved "substantial conformity" with all federal standards. **North Dakota met nine of 14 outcomes, which was more than any other state.**
- The review identified several areas needing improvement, and the state developed and is now implementing a Program Improvement Plan. North Dakota has already met many of the goals in the plan and continues to collaborate with counties to further improve child welfare services. To monitor progress, the state conducts comparable reviews in each human service center region.



- In 2003, North Dakota completed its first annual review of child welfare services in all eight human service center regions with an overall rating of 83.7%.
- In 2004, the second regional review yielded an overall rating of 90.1%.

Areas Most Improved:

Data from the federal review and the two department-conducted reviews identified the following outcomes:

- Conformance with the safety standard titled **Risk of Harm to Children** increased from 78% to 92.7%. The aggregate compliance rate for the three regions reviewed through mid-February 2005 was 98% on this measure.
- Conformance with the standard on **Needs And Services Of The Child, Parents, And Foster Parents** increased from 50% to 81.7%. Reviews of three regions conducted through February 2005 show conformance at 90%.
- **Worker Visits With Child** conformance grew from 78% to 91.5%.
- Conformance with the **Mental Health Of The Child** standard increased from 80% to 88.9%.

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Improving Performance:

- North Dakota received an overall rating of 83% on the 2001 federal CFSR.

Areas Needing Improvement:

North Dakota continues to experience challenges in some areas.

- Conformance with the federal standard for **Repeat Maltreatment** (refers to additional reports of suspected abuse or neglect related to a specific perpetrator) fell from 89.3% in 2001 to 85.4% in 2004. This indicates an increase in repeat maltreatment reports during that time period. This trend appears to be turning around in a positive direction. 2005 reviews completed in three regions through mid-February showed that together those regions were in 93% conformance with this federal child safety standard.

National research indicates that the re-entry of children into the foster care system is often related to the quantity and quality of worker visits with children and parents and the meaningful involvement of children and parents in their own case planning. Several performance measures show some improvement, but continue to be of concern related to the quality of the service being provided.

- Conformance with the **Foster Care Re-Entries** standard changed from 84.7% to 81.8% from 2001 to 2004 showing an increase in entries of children back into foster care. Reviews completed in three regions through February 2005 showed that together those regions were 86% in conformance with this federal standard.
- **Worker Visits With The Child** improved overall to 89% conformance in 2004. However, subsequent reviews indicate that worker visits may not focus on the pertinent issues of the case plan, the services recommended, or the attainment of goals set for the child and family. Through February 15, 2005, the department completed three of the eight regional reviews scheduled for 2005. Those reviews indicated a 95% conformance rate.
- **Worker Visits With Parents** improved from 82% in 2001 to 86.2% in 2004. Reviews completed in three regions through mid-February 2005 showed a 92% conformance rate.

Ongoing Performance Review Process:

- Reviews of all eight human service center regions and county social service offices have been scheduled for 2005.
- The review process includes case level reviews involving children and families in the child welfare system.
- The review team also holds a series of stakeholder meetings in each region involving groups such as educators, case workers, interested community members, agency directors and supervisors, law enforcement personnel, and foster parents. County commissioners and state legislators are invited to attend these stakeholder meetings.
- In addition, administrative staff members from the North Dakota Supreme Court are invited to participate in regional reviews. This is intended to better integrate the work of the court system's Court Improvement Project with the child welfare system's Children and Family Services Review.
- This process provides important information about the strengths and challenges specific to each region.

Next Federal Review:

- North Dakota is scheduled for its next federal review in 2007.
- Child welfare professionals anticipate that the review process will be an ongoing and integral method of determining best practices in child welfare services far into the future.

N.D. Department of Human Services Children & Family Services Division Paul Ronningen, Director

600 E Boulevard Ave.
Bismarck ND 58505-0250
Fax: (701) 328-3538
dhscfs@state.nd.us
(701) 328-2316, TTY: 701-328-3480